Creating the World In Which You Want to Live: Student Affairs as Community

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Goals

- Share the story of OSU’s organizational journey
- Explore significant issues in organizational transition and change
- Provide opportunity for dialogue
Setting the Context
Environmental Issues

• An institutional priority to increase the diversity of our staff and student body;
• An articulated goal of increasing student enrollment;
• We were in the midst of a search for a new President for the University;
• We were losing 24% of our students at the end of their first year of attendance;
Environmental Issues

- There was overt competition among University staff for institutional resources;
- A volatile political environment where tax-payers had for several previous years voted to reduce funding to the government and schools;
- A swing of political conservatism that resulted in a number of ballot measures that created angry public debate about the value of higher education;
Evidence of the need for leadership and community

• The institution was ailing

• Lives of members were disconnected

• Personal value was questioned

• Many people in the organizations behaved as if they were “at-risk” or expressed feelings of being “at-risk”
Examples of “at-risk” behaviors

- Absence of hope for the future;
- Inability to engage in trusting relationships;
- Inability to take risks on behalf of self or others;
- Cynicism about institutional values
- Short-term view (here and now orientation) – “just get through it”
What are the responsibilities of those of us who call ourselves leaders?

- To name and own institutional problems
- To be change agents within our sphere of influence
- To model hope and optimism
- To practice Generativity
We are meaning makers and place makers

• Make meaning of relationships (add strength, power and substance)

• Bring order to chaos

• Foster connections among the isolated

• Give audibility to the voiceless
We are meaning makers and place makers

• Bring visibility to the invisible

• Pull the marginalized into the center

• Help others discover possibilities for their lives
Engagement of soul and spirit

- Acknowledge affective dimension of leadership
- Love for those who we lead
- Experience pain at the failure of others
- Expose our soul in relationships
- Stay true during the difficult moments
- Take risks to show how much we care
Facilitate dialogue, discovery and creativity

• Who are we?

• Why are we here?

• What do we hope to get done?

• What do we aspire to create?
Defining Question:

What does our university most need from us right now?
Focus On Wholeness For Individuals And Groups

- Honor pain and struggles
- Allow for vulnerability and humility
- Construct relationships rooted in possibilities
- Enhance capacity for sharing and communication - use conversation as a community building mechanism
Leaders are Characterized by Energy and Destination

• Energy can be random or focused
• Individual and collective energies are used in relation to a shared destination
• Energy has physical, spiritual, psychological and emotional dimensions
• Grapple with the question “how do we pool our energy to create the best possible future for our organization?”
Leadership and Community Building

• Focus on creative leadership
• Embrace the mission
• Focus on interdependence and shared destiny
• Focus on hope
• Foster pride in the heritage of the community
• Construct meaningful conversations
Guiding Principles

- Follow the energy
- People are sacred, structure is not
- Whatever we decide it must produce growth
Key Stages in Growth

• Assessing the psychological and emotional condition of the current members
• Generating the energy to consider other possibilities for the future
• Creating a safe place for conversation
• Developing an understanding that the fate of Student Affairs is tied to the fate of the institution
• Developing a clear agenda
Key Outcomes

- A clear statement of vision, values and commitments
- Relationships and partnerships
- Accountability and responsibility
- An articulated leadership agenda
- Statement of desired achievements
What We Learned

• We are able to sustain focused dialogue with each other over an extended time period.
• We can be productive in a non-hierarchical structure (in a vision and relationship-based structure)
• Given space, opportunity and an agenda people will step forward to lead and contribute.
What We Learned

• Energy is the most important resource we have at our disposal.

• The important role student affairs needs to play in modeling leadership, accountability and responsibility to our colleagues across the campus.
What does our university most need from us right now?
How can we use our leadership roles to promote greater mission focus at UCSD?
In what areas is our collective leadership potential under-realized?
Where must healing take place if we are to achieve the level of community and leadership towards which we aspire?
Most of what we do in communities and organizations focuses us on our individual needs.

True community is different. True community connects us at a deeper level.

As we share our different human experiences, we rediscover a sense of unity. We remember we are part of a greater whole.

And, as an added joy, we also discover our collective wisdom. We suddenly see how wise we can be together.

Adapted from Margaret Wheatley